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TAGS: PREL PHUM PGOV ASEC GJ XL
SUBJECT: CONGRESSWOMAN'S VISIT TO "GRENADA 13" PRISONER

REF: A. BRIDGETOWN 509
1B. 06 GRENADA 66
1C. 06 BRIDGETOWN 1258

Classified By: DCM Mary Ellen T. Gilroy for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: During CODEL Engel's recent visit to Grenada, Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) asked post to arrange a meeting with Bernard Coard, the leader of the group known as the "Grenada 17" who were convicted of the 1983 assassination of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and others. PM Mitchell approved the request and Embassy Bridgetown FSN Investigator and PolOff (both men) accompanied Rep. Waters and her husband to Grenada's main prison. An animated Coard discussed current events with the Congresswoman and supplied her with the names of the remaining 13 prisoners and his attorney. He claimed to harbor "no animosity" towards the Government of Grenada (GOG). Rep. Waters promised Coard she would talk to USG officials about the case. Later in the day, following the CODEL's meeting with PM Mitchell in the President's Box at the Grenada National Cricket Stadium, Rep. Waters and her husband remained behind to speak with the PM.

12. (C) Since the February 2007 decision of the London Privy Council that the "Grenada 13" had received a fair trial, the group has lost its political prisoner status. By declaring the death sentence invalid, and therefore the commutation to life in prison invalid, the Privy Council returned the case to the Grenada Supreme Court for resentencing. Even after 23 years, repercussions of the 1979-83 revolutionary period resonate deeply in Grenadian politics. End Summary.

ARRANGING A PRISON VISIT FOR REP. WATERS

13. (C) During CODEL Engel's April 13-15 visit to Grenada (ref A), Congresswoman Maxine Waters of California asked post to arrange a meeting at Grenada's main prison with Bernard Coard. Coard was the leader of the group later known as the "Grenada 17" who were convicted of killing Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and other officials in the internal coup in October 1983 that resulted in the U.S.-CARICOM intervention. Coard's brother is resident in Rep. Waters' congressional district. Charge made the request directly to PM Keith Mitchell by telephone on April 13. Mitchell approved the request, as long as prison rules were followed, and directed his Permanent Secretary to arrange the visit with the Commissioner of Prisons. Coard, and others involved in the factional uprising within the Bishop government which resulted in the killings, have been in prison for over 20 years, serving life sentences.

¶4. (C) Because the meeting was to occur during regular prison visiting hours on April 14, Charge arranged for an Embassy Bridgetown security office FSN and PolOff (both men) to accompany Rep. Waters. Usually, all prisoners and their visitors are seated at one long table for their 15-minute meetings and post wanted to ensure Rep. Water's safety. As it turned out, the meeting took place in a small conference room. PolOff Christopher R. Reynolds accompanied Rep. Waters and her husband, former U.S. Ambassador to the Bahamas Sidney Williams, into the room, but remained in the back throughout.

45 MINUTES WITH BERNARD COARD

¶5. (C) Bernard Coard, who is 62, appeared energetic and both mentally and physically alert. He talked about a series of eye operations he has undergone to correct cataracts. Coard told Waters he was impressed with her work against South African apartheid and mentioned that he had met Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums. He added that he has experienced a "spiritual awakening" in prison and has "no animosity" towards the current government of Grenada. Coard was familiar with political events in both Grenada and the United States, including a recent teachers' strike in Grenada and the Democrats' victory in the November 2006 U.S. elections. The meeting lasted 45 minutes, much longer than the 15 minutes post expected.

¶6. (C) In response to Rep. Waters' questions, Coard gave her the names of the so-called "Grenada 13," reduced from 17 by the release of three triggermen on December 2, 2006 (ref B) and of Bernard Coard's Jamaican wife, Phyllis Coard, "temporarily" released in 2000 to undergo chemotherapy in Jamaica. (She remains in Jamaica where her husband intends eventually to relocate.) Coard also provided the name of his Grenadian attorney, Ruggles Ferguson of Ciboney Chambers, who is also the head of the Grenadian Bar Association and a rising young star. Rep. Waters promised to discuss the case with USG officials. The meeting lasted 45 minutes, much longer than the 15 minutes post expected.

¶7. (C) Later in the day, following the CODEL's meeting with PM Mitchell in the President's Box at the Grenada National Cricket Stadium, Rep. Waters and her husband remained behind to speak with Mitchell. They joined the group about half an hour later.

COMMENT: THE PAST IS EVER PRESENT

¶8. (C) The fate of the prisoners remains a political hot potato in Grenada, a fact the Privy Council noted, stating "the question of the appellants' fate is so politically charged that it is hardly reasonable to expect any Government of Grenada, even 23 years after the tragic events of October 1983, to take an objective view of the matter." PM Mitchell told Charge that he did not want to deny Rep. Waters a meeting with Coard so that "no one can point to me." He further remarked that "he (Coard) is a convicted murderer, but if she wants to talk to him, that's fine."

¶9. (C) Since the release in early February 2007 of the Privy Council of London's decision that the "Grenada 13" had received a fair trial, the group has lost its political prisoner status. The Privy Council ruled the original death sentence, which was commuted in 1991 to life in prison, improper, sending the case back to the Grenada Supreme Court for resentencing. The actual judgment was a relief for the GOG as it did not call for a complete retrial, which could potentially have torn the veneer of civility from the current tentative discussion of about the revolutionary period and its political impact on the present.

¶10. (C) For their part, Coard, his fellow inmates, and the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) were bitterly disappointed in the ruling. They had fully expected the 13 to walk out of prison the day the ruling was released and to

be able to sue the government for large amounts of money for wrongful imprisonment. Lawyers have requested a sentencing date, but thus far the case is not on the court's calendar. The GOG wisely has allowed the legal process to function. The only official comment was that the GOG was satisfied with the Privy Council ruling.

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